



AICR Calls on Americans to End 20-Year Eating Binge

Reprinted with permission from the American Institute for Cancer Research

"We now have enough complementary research results to tell an amazing story: how a whole society lost its sense of appropriate portion size, ate too much and slid passively into overweight and obesity," said Jeffrey R. Prince, Vice President for Education at the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR.) "During the past twenty years, portion sizes in commercial establishments have ballooned. At the same time, the percentage of Americans who are overweight or obese has risen steadily, to 64 percent.

Research cited by Prince indicates that most categories of people - men, women, children over 5, those at a healthy weight and those who are overweight - tend to eat as much as 56 percent more in the presence of larger portions.

Officials at AICR have often called on people "to end unconscious overeating and take a good look at their plates." To regain some sense of how regular portion sizes have expanded, the Institute suggests comparing portions on the plate with USDA standard serving sizes. Although contemporary Americans often consume 8 or 12 ounces of steak, the USDA standard serving of steak is 3 ounces. Similarly, although we often chow down on 3 or more cups of pasta, the standard serving is 1/2 cup.

"No one is suggesting that we always limit ourselves to a single standard serving of our favorite food. But we can use USDA standard servings as a gauge to measure just how far beyond yesterday's norms we have strayed," Prince said.

Melanie Polk, AICR Director of Nutrition Education, demonstrated how to measure portion size. She poured her regular portion of hot cereal into a bowl. Then after

checking the list of USDA standard serving sizes, she poured the standard serving (1/2 cup) into an identical bowl. "Compare the two bowls," she said. "Then ask yourself, given my activity level, how many standard servings should go into the portion I eat?"

A woman who jogs four miles a day or a man who rakes leaves all morning may need two or more standard servings in his or her portion. But an individual who is sedentary and tends to put on weight should consider decreasing the number of servings he or she eats. "Cut back gradually so you'll be less likely to notice the change. Even small reductions will add up to substantial health benefits," Polk said.

Prince suggested that Americans develop defenses against marketing ploys. "When a server says that for just a quarter more you can super-size that meal, tell him or her politely, 'I'll keep my quarter and you keep the extra calories.'"

In eateries, AICR officials recommend that people say "half," say "small" and share. If an establishment no longer offers "small" orders, insist on the smallest size available.

Another recommended defense is splitting a meal in two and slipping half into a doggie bag before beginning to eat. Also, sharing an oversized single meal will save calories and money. "If none of that works, try eating a few more well-measured meals at home or brown bagging it for a few weeks," Prince said.

"It would be nice if all the value meals, super-sized items and entrees spilling over 12-inch plates just disappeared. But that may not happen until food marketers see that their customers just won't pay for oversized products anymore," concluded Prince.

Recognize that portion sizes in many commercial eating establishments are oversized and take the necessary steps to avoid over-consuming. If your weight begins to creep up, take the initiative. *Shape Your Future... Your Weigh!™* can provide additional practical

strategies to prevent weight gain. Contact your local Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Dietitian for more information.